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QUESTION OF ANTARCTICA

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. By its resolution 47/57 of 9 December 1992, the General Assembly, inter alia, reaffirming the principle that the international community was entitled to information covering all aspects of Antarctica and that the United Nations should be made the repository for all such information in accordance with Assembly resolutions 41/88 A of 4 December 1986, 42/46 B of 30 November 1987, 43/83 A of 7 December 1988, 44/124 B of 15 December 1989, 45/78 A of 12 December 1990 and 46/41 A of 6 December 1991, encouraged the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties 1/ to provide to the Secretary-General, on a continuing basis, more information and documents covering all aspects of Antarctica, and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on his evaluations thereof to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session.

2. Accordingly, the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to the States parties to the Antarctic Treaty asking them to reply in pursuance of paragraph 5 of resolution 47/57 as soon as possible, but not later than 30 May 1993.

3. On 19 August 1993, the Secretary-General received the following note from the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, responding on behalf of the States parties to the Antarctic Treaty:

> "The Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and, pursuant to his note of 28 May 1993, sent on behalf of the States parties to the Antarctic Treaty, has the honour to enclose herewith two English-language copies of the final report of the Seventeenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, held at Venice from 11 to 20 November 1992."

4. A summary of that report follows below.

II. SUMMARY OF INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTS COVERING ALL ASPECTS OF ANTARCTICA RECEIVED FROM THE ANTARCTIC TREATY CONSULTATIVE PARTIES

5. The final report of the Seventeenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (available upon request from the Secretariat) contains detailed information about different aspects of Antarctica.

6. The agenda reflects, inter alia, that the following issues were taken up:

A. Operation of the Antarctic Treaty system.

B. Inspections under the Antarctic Treaty.

C. Environmental monitoring.

D. Implementation of environmental impact assessment procedures.

E. The Antarctic protected area system.

F. International scientific and logistic cooperation.

G. Tourism and non-governmental activities in the Antarctic Treaty area.

H. Marine hydrometeorological services to navigation in the Southern Ocean.

I. Cooperation in hydrographic surveying and charting of Antarctic water.

J. Air safety in Antarctica.

K. Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.

L. Antarctic meteorology and telecommunications.

M. Questions related to the exercise of jurisdiction in Antarctica.

7. The Meeting also received reports from the following:

(a) The Chairman of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR);

(b) The head of the delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in his capacity as the representative of the Depository Government of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals;

(c) The President of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR);

(d) The head of the delegation of the United States of America in his capacity as the representative of the Depository Government of the Antarctic Treaty;

(e) The Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations in his capacity as Convenor of the Informal Group of Treaty Parties;

(f) The Chairman of the Council of the Managers of National Antarctic Programmes (COMNAP);

(g) The representative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO);

(h) The representative of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO);

(i) The representative of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC).

8. The Seventeenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting discussed the question of implementation of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. The representative of the Depository Government informed the Meeting that 36 Contracting Parties, including 26 Consultative Parties, had issued the Protocol since its opening for signature on 4 October 1991 at Madrid. At the meeting, it was noted that Spain had deposited its instruments of ratification and that it appeared from the parties' reports that other parties would be able to do so in the next months and that some others would act similarly in 1994.

9. The Meeting discussed the working papers received from the delegations of Chile, New Zealand and Australia regarding draft rules of procedure and other aspects involved in the establishment of the Committee for Environmental Protection foreseen in articles 11 and 12 of the Protocol. Such draft rules of procedure would need to be adopted by the Committee itself and approved subsequently by the Consultative Meeting. The Meeting expressed general support for the view that the establishment of the Committee and its functioning should be possible as soon as the Protocol entered into force.

10. The Consultative Meeting also devoted considerable time to discussing the establishment of the secretariat, its location, functions, composition, legal status and sharing of costs involved. As a result of the discussions, the Meeting arrived at consensus that a secretariat should be established to assist the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and the Committee for Environmental Protection in performing their functions.

11. The Meeting further reviewed the problem of inspections under the Antarctic Treaty and emphasized the importance of promoting inspections within the Antarctic Treaty as a means of monitoring activities in Antarctica and exchanging information. The Meeting also stressed that inspections demonstrated the transparency of the Antarctic Treaty and indicated that inspection, in addition to verifying adherence to the fundamental principles and objectives of the Treaty, should now place emphasis on environmental matters. In that connection, it is important to note that the Meeting agreed to invite SCAR and COMNAP to prepare an inspection check-list to assist in the assessment of adherence to the requirements of the Antarctic Treaty and the Protocol on Environmental Protection.

12. The Meeting also considered environmental monitoring issues and welcomed the report and recommendations of the First Meeting of Experts on Environmental Monitoring in Antarctica, held at Buenos Aires from 1 to 4 June 1992.

13. The Seventeenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting adopted recommendations concerning proposed management plans for some specially protected areas.

14. The Meeting received a report from the Chairman of the Informal Meeting on Tourism held at Venice on 9 and 10 November 1992 in accordance with recommendation XVI-13. The Informal Meeting examined the issues identified in that recommendation without arriving at any specific conclusions. The Meeting analysed the existing recommendations regarding tourism and non-governmental activities, as well as the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty and its annexes. All parties indicated that the Protocol and its annexes applied to all activities in Antarctica, including tourism and non-governmental activities. At the same time, some parties, including the initiators of a draft annex on tourism to the Protocol, 2/ noted that more precise regulations having legally binding force were required for such activities. Some other parties were of the view that, with respect to environmental protection, the most important and immediate task was the early entry into force and implementation of the Protocol and its annexes. Another group put forward the view that implementation of the Protocol and relevant provisions of the Treaty and recommendations would be promoted in a practical way by providing a statement of provisions for parties and the organizers of tourism and non-governmental activities to assist in understanding and meeting relevant obligations. Some parties, including the five that had initiated the draft annex mentioned above, proposed the convening of a meeting in 1993 before the next Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in order to continue the urgent examination of the issues identified in recommendation XVI-13, that remained pending. Some other parties did not agree to that proposal and felt that recommendation XVI-13 had been adequately discussed. Still other parties agreed to an inter-sessional meeting that was properly prepared and gave prospects for progress. They suggested that their papers contain a number of considerations that could be examined in future work.

15. The Meeting discussed two information papers submitted by WMO, which contained information about improvements in Antarctic telecommunications using satellite technology and the deficiencies in the existing observational networks. The Meeting welcomed the work carried out in Antarctica by WMO, both in the field of weather forecasting and atmospheric science. The activity of the organization included coordinating efforts, preparing recommendations and distributing specific information on meteorological and atmospheric phenomena affecting Antarctica and the global system.

16. The Meeting acknowledged that the trend of observed ozone depletion continued. On 4 October 1992, Japanese meteorologists working from Syowa station in Antarctica recorded their "lowest ever" ozone reading. Measurements made at research centres in Argentina, Australia and Chile and by the National Science Foundation of the United States, among others, showed a rise in ultraviolet radiation and the eleventh meeting of CCAMLR had expressed concern about the adverse effects that ultraviolet B radiation could have on the

Antarctic marine ecosystem. The Meeting agreed that that information should be made known to the parties to the Montreal Protocol.

17. The Meeting adopted some very important recommendations relating, inter alia, to environmental monitoring and data management. It recommended that Governments take the following steps:

(a) Through their SCAR national committees, request SCAR to consider and provide advice on the types of long-term programmes, if any, necessary to verify that human activities (such as tourism, scientific research or other activities) do not have significant adverse effects on birds, seals and plants;

(b) Adopt emission standards that should be established to ensure that the combustion of fossil fuels and incineration of waste do not contaminate the Antarctic atmosphere, terrestrial, ice aquatic or marine environments in a way that would compromise their scientific value.

18. In a statement by the CCAMLR observer, it was noted that krill continued to be the most important species being fished in the 1991/92 season and reported at around 288,000 tons, 19 per cent less than in 1990/91. It was also indicated that all commercial fish species were now subject to CCAMLR regulations. In some areas fishing was prohibited, in others catch limits, mesh size regulations and restricted seasons applied. Some experimental small-scale fishing had been allowed in limited areas for the purposes of gathering data to assess populations of relatively unknown stocks. The Commission also noted that an important principle with regard to the management of new and developing fisheries was that their development should be linked directly to the process of elaborating scientific advice and management procedures. The Commission last year adopted a conservation measure that required members planning to initiate a new fishery to submit information that would allow an assessment of the likely impact of a fishery and the subsequent adoption of any necessary regulations to apply before that fishing was allowed to develop.

19. In his report to the Meeting, the COMNAP representative noted, inter alia, that the various national programmes of science and support activities in Antarctica were conducted in accordance with the purpose and principles of the Antarctic Treaty and reflected the diversity, cohesion and relevance that were hallmarks of the Treaty system. It was also noted that the Treaty had been strengthened by the adoption of the Protocol on Environmental Protection.

20. During the last four years, COMNAP and the Standing Committee on Antarctic Logistic Operations (SCALOP) had placed high priority on addressing the issue of marine pollution in Antarctic waters. Compared with most other areas of the world's oceans, the waters of the Antarctic were not threatened by the bulk crude carriers and other hazards of major shipping lanes. By far the greatest risk was posed by the use of fuel oils. Nearly all of the relatively small numbers of ships regularly operating south of 60°S carried only lighter diesel fuels. COMNAP indicated in that connection that from analysis of fuel transport and storage activities in Antarctica, it had been concluded that the activities that presented the greatest threat were the carriage of cargo fuels and bunkers by ships, the transfer of cargo fuels from ship to shore and the storage and transfer of fuels at stations and bases.

21. In 1990 COMNAP adopted the recommendations prepared by the SCALOP Subgroup on Oil Prevention and Response directed towards preventing or reducing the impact of oil spills. Those measures included the following:

(a) Adoption of a minimum standard of at least one season of ice navigation experience for officers on vessels under charter or in support of Antarctic operations;

(b) Agreement to use light non-persistent fuel oils whenever practicable;

(c) Adoption of recommended procedures for fuel transfer at stations and bases;

(d) Adoption of recommended procedures for spill prevention and containment of fuel oil at stations and bases;

(e) Identification with national authorities and IHO.

22. To assist national operators with the task of developing contingency plans, the SCALOP Subgroup developed a document entitled "Guidelines for Oil Spill Contingency Planning", adopted by COMNAP in 1992. COMNAP also adopted a recommendation requiring that vessels operating under charter or in support of Antarctic operations have on board a shipload oil pollution contingency plan by 1995. That action is consistent with article 12 of annex IV of the Protocol and is to be undertaken with reference to current IMO guidelines for implementation of the 1973 International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships and its Protocol of 1978.

23. In his report, the COMNAP representative noted that the future activities of the Council would move in the direction of current trends: environmental protection and implementation of the Protocol, and expanding methodology in support of science and international cooperation.

24. In the view of COMNAP, the Antarctic Treaty system was moving towards increased integration of its components, while respecting the role and responsibility of each of them. He stressed further that the system continued to demonstrate the benefit to all mankind of preserving a continent for peaceful purposes and the value of international cooperation in scientific research aimed at understanding the complex relationships between the planet Earth and human activities.

III. CONCLUSION

25. Information provided by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties has shown continuing progress in the field of international cooperation directed towards better understanding the remote Antarctic continent. The final report of the Seventeenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting included much information related to action undertaken in 1992 by the Consultative Parties and different international organizations involved in the scientific research of Antarctica. It should be noted that there is a marked trend to move the Antarctic Treaty system towards increased action in relation to environmental aspects of Antarctica. At the same time, the effective international cooperation in

scientific research and environmental priorities given by the Antarctic Treaty system serves as a guarantee for the preservation of the continent for peaceful purposes, further strengthening the area as a zone of peace and cooperation.

Notes

1/ The States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty are the following (underlining indicates consultative status): Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Poland, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay.

2/ A draft annex on tourism to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty was prepared by Chile, France, Germany and Spain.